

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part twenty-five

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THROUGH FAITH AND PATIENCE INHERIT THE PROMISES

Hebrews 6:9-12 - "Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. [10] For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. [11] And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, [12] so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

The change in tone at this point of the chapter is obvious. Our writer - for the very first time in this letter - calls these persecuted Jewish believers "**beloved**" (9). And there's nothing very striking about that at first glance. Many letters in the New Testament are peppered with endearing terms for those addressed. But I think there *is* an important lesson for the church if we pause a minute and think the whole context of that term - "**beloved**" - right through.

1) GOSPEL LOVE SEES THE POWER OF GOD'S GRACE BEING ACTIVATED THROUGH WARNINGS BASED ON THE REALITY OF SIN AND THE CONVICTING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Hebrews 6:9 - "Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation."

Consider this. Think of the words our writer has used to describe his readers only verses earlier - **warning them** that they might fall prey to "**...an evil, unbelieving heart,**" and "**...fall away from the living God**" (3:12) - **cautioning them** so they wouldn't "**...be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin**" (3:13) - **warning them** again not to **fail to enter into God's "rest"** (4:1) - **warning them** again about **falling "by the same sort of disobedience"** (4:11), **stating plainly** they have "**...become dull of hearing**" (5:11) - **telling them clearly** they are still **infants and "unskilled in the word of righteousness"** (5:13) - **warning them** it can get to a point where it is "**impossible to renew**" some people to repentance (6:6) - and finally he warns if after the rain of God's grace some lives produce "**thorns and thistles**" there is nothing left in the end but "**...to be burned**" (6:8).

Then suddenly, in **verse 9**, these same people are verbally embraced with the writers "**beloved.**" And I'm saying there is something profoundly important to be learned for the church in our present culture of uncritical tolerance and morally neutered acceptance.

These red-hot - at times blistering warnings - are not a sign these Christians were **unloved**, or even **less-loved** than had these warnings never been issued. Not at all. These warnings are the **proof** these Jewish Christians were all the more **deeply loved** because the love they received was **gospel love**. And what I mean by that is the **confidence** our writer has of "**better things**" (9) for these persecuted Christians is a confidence **based on the positive effect of the warnings given earlier**. He trusts they will make good **use** of these warnings.

That's the most important point to note here. Our writer has confidence in their ultimate progress and faithfulness **because** he believes his severe warnings will be **used by God** to keep these people alert to the dangers and to correcting their immaturity. While not **irresistible**, God's keeping grace wasn't **contrary** to those warnings. It was **the fruit of those stern warnings heeded**. No **warnings**, no **grace**. No **warnings**, no **confidence**.

The reason I think this matters is there is such a blind move of the church into a kind of **café and sandals Christianity** whose ultimate expression of gospel love is **peaceful cultural non-collision**. The idea is we in the church somehow betray a true demonstration of Christ if we are **against anything** that has a broad acceptance in our culture and might make us look ridiculous if we are shouting warnings about it from the rooftops. I mean, how relevant can we look while doing that?

What's worse, there might be some who are **professing Christians** who do some of these things and our warnings will only either anger or discourage them. And there can't be anything Christ-like in that. Surely **confronting** professing Christian people can't be **helping** them. And it can't possibly be **loving** them.

And on the surface all of that logic **feels** fine and might have the appearance of holding together. Then you pick up any New Testament and start reading. And every **divinely inspired writer packs every document written to and for Christians saved by grace with warnings - oodles and oodles of them.**

There are warnings about *idolatry*, warnings about *materialism*, warnings about *infidelity*, warnings about *lying*, warnings about *homosexuality*, warnings about *lust*, warnings about *prayerlessness*, warnings about *laziness*, warnings about *drunkenness*, warnings about *not faithfully attending a local church*, warnings about *loving this present world*, warnings about *slander and unkind speech*, warnings about *not honoring parents*.

Do you see how long this list *could* be made? And the point here is not just that there is *instruction* about successfully *avoiding* these things. That isn't even close to my point. The point in all of these blunt passages is not *instruction for success in these things*. The point is *warning about failing in these things*. And the challenging point here is since the Fall lives can't be made secure in grace by positive promises alone.

Here is the unique feature of gospel warnings. Gospel warnings *compare* the results of obedience when the *costs* of obedience seems too high with the cost of *disobedience* when it seems easier. Without gospel warnings many people find *obedience* difficult only because the cost of *obeying* was never accurately *contrasted* with the cost of *disobeying*.

Gospel warning is the effort of the whole New Testament is to implement what they had all heard Jesus say about the *man who started to build a tower but never considered the cost of completing it*.

The church simply must apply this point if she is to remain a New Testament church. This means when you stop speaking to a culture with Scripturally based warning you are not *magnifying grace*. It means you have stopped *offering* divine grace. This is the terrible temptation for the church once it discovers there are many inside and outside the church who only want God's grace on their own terms - *non-gospel* terms. And what they want is the grace of mere *acceptance* - mere *tolerance*.

And here's the problem. This is no longer *gospel* grace. It's empty *human acceptance* - not the divine grace of *repentance and conversion*. It is never easy to offer truly divine gospel grace to self-centered people. But if we love them as God loves them we must never stop paying the price of offering true gospel grace which comes only through repentance.

2) HOW TO KNOW IF YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN

Hebrews 6:9-10 - "Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—*things that belong to salvation*. [10] For God is not unjust so as to overlook *your work* and *the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints*, as you still do."

Of course, anyone at all can *claim* to be a Christian. But our writer here is dealing with the things that *"belong to salvation"* (9). There are two things described in these verses that are the DNA of Christian experience. *First*, there is what our writer describes as *"your work"* (10), and *second*, there is *"...the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints...."* (10).

First, the work. The *"work"* is singular rather than plural. It's not a *list of good deeds* (works), but the *"work"* of your life. It's the *mission*, the *call*, the *main course* of your life. It's what makes your life *tick*. It's the full understanding of your true self as you get out of bed in the morning. *Why* did God give you a new day? What was His *purpose* in that gift?

Paul uses almost the exact same words in **1 Thessalonians 1:3** - *"...remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."*

You *do*, of course, many things. The issue in our text is *why are you here as a Christian?* What are you *chiefly about?* How is the whole *meaning* of your life changed in Christ? What is the *orientation of your life now that you are a follower of Christ?* We're dealing with your *center* in these words.

Don't over-complicate this. There are really only *two points* in this description of your *"work."* *First*, your mission for Christ in this world is your *main daily assignment*. It can never be something *part-time*. It can never be seriously taken up *occasionally*. It's not a *portion* of your life. It's your *work*. It's the *work you are on earth for*.

And *second*, it's called your *"work"* because it will always require *expended effort*. You will always have to be *at pains to be doing it*. Everything in the present culture - just as it was in the New Testament - presses against the forming of Christ in my life. That's why the activity of divine grace in human experience is described as *"work"* - *diligence* that drives the whole life

to Christ when there is tremendous cost in doing so.

Every letter in the New Testament makes the same link between *diligence* and *grace*: **2 Peter 1:10-12** - "Therefore, brothers, *be all the more diligent* to confirm your calling and election, for if you *practice these qualities* you will never fall. [11] For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. [12] Therefore *I intend always to remind you of these qualities*, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have."

And the really relevant point for our study is the *context* of Peter's words about being "*all the more diligent...*" (10). His impassioned words about extreme effort and diligence follow right on the heels of these - **2 Peter 1:2-5** - "*May grace and peace be multiplied* to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. [3] *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, [4] by which he has *granted to us his precious and very great promises*, so that through them you may *become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire*. [5] For this very reason, *make every effort...*"

Remember where we are. We are considering the *two signs of authentic Christianity* in **verse 10** - "For God is not unjust so as to overlook *your work* and the *love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints*, as you still do."

So the two evidences are described as "*your work*" (which we've just considered) and "*the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints*." That's where we're now turning our attention. The *second reason* our writer has confidence these Jewish Christians possess the "*...things that belong to salvation*" (9), is "*...the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints...*" (10).

The examples of this love are more fully described in **Hebrews 10:34** and **Hebrews 13:3** - "For *you had compassion on those in prison*, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one....**13:3**....*Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.*"

Look carefully at the *motive* behind the compassionate treatment of these imprisoned Christians. The same motive is listed in the last half of each description. *Why* these Jewish Christians were so compassionate is clearly stated - **10:34** - "*...since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession....*" And **13:3** - "*...since you also are in the body.*"

Now go back to our text in **Hebrews 6:10** - "*...the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints...*" Do you see the repetition of the same point? *Humanitarian* love can be shown by anyone with the remnants of a loving heart from creation. Atheists can do it.

Kingdom love is rooted in a different motive. It sacrifices from the security of a "*better possession*" (10:34). It remembers its responsibility to even the most needy in the church "*...since you also are in the body*" (13:3). And its ultimate concern isn't human recognition or even appreciation. True Christians continue to show love for the glory of Christ's name - "*...the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints*" (6:10).

So consider this. There is a reason the New Testament consistently pleads for faithfulness to a local body of believers in a church. You won't see the needs - the hurting needs of fellow Christians - watching a service streamed on the internet. And you won't feel the weight of the hurting if you hop around to whatever church you feel the Spirit leading you to on any given Sunday. God places all of us - with varying levels of prosperity and circumstance - so this practical grace of effective Christian love can grow and develop over time with discernment and accountability. Without the local church this grace - this vital evidence of what "*belongs to salvation*" (6:9) will never grow in your life in a responsible way.

Notice how these two evidences of *work* and *love* are tightly tied to the promise of God and His unending faithfulness - **Hebrews 6:10** - "For God is not unjust *so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.*"

Why this reminder? My *work* toward holiness and my *love* for others in the body will always face *opposition*. My own *laziness* will constantly make excuses. Or, my own *business* will constantly distract my efforts into less important ends. *Self-love* is easy for me. *Christian love* isn't.

And then this. I know all of God's promises about *seeking His kingdom first*. I know Christ said it is *more blessed to give than to receive*. But I only believe those words on a *certain* level. They don't always ring true the way my present *desires* and *circumstances* and *financial statements* ring true. And that can keep me from *receiving* all God has for me when I step out in trust.

I see in this text I still need to be reminded, "*God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and love....*" You won't always *feel* it and you won't always *see* it. Remember, nothing is reliable apart from trusting God's promise and obeying Christ's command. Just as Jesus taught in **Matthew 7**, every other foundation - even the most promising and attractive - will collapse.

And that leads into our third point:

3) **YOU WILL INHERIT THE PROMISES EVEN THOUGH YOU CAN'T YET SEE THEM**

Hebrews 6:11-12 - "And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the *full assurance of hope until the end*, [12] so that you may *not be sluggish*, but imitators of those who *through faith and patience inherit the promises*."

We've already seen how "*sluggishness*" (12) comes from being "*dull of hearing*" (5:11). Remember, dullness of hearing is evidenced by *any failure to move beyond wherever I presently am in my walk with Christ*.

And our writer now explains why Christians sometimes reach these stages of *dullness* or *sluggishness*. We don't always *experience* the same *awareness of dramatic change* we once felt with we first came to Christ.

That's why our writer doesn't just urge "*earnestness*" on these Jewish Christians. He carefully calls upon them to show the "*same earnestness*" (6:11). He means the same earnestness they had when they first came to Christ.

But there's a problem. When these Jewish believers *first* came to Christ it was all *new*. Every change felt like a *radical* change. And there was the sudden discovery of Jesus as the promised Messiah - the Christ who fulfilled all the Old Covenant.

Then the persecution came. Questions arose. *Maintenance* is never as exciting as *first discovery*. The kind of development these Christians - and most of us here today - face was the development of *growth* rather than *birth*. It's the development of a *walk* of faith.

So here's the final exhortation of this text. Remember how most growth occurs for maturing Christians - "*...through faith and patience inherit the promises*."

Yes. There are seasons of special grace and touch. And there could be more for sure with fresh waiting on God and deeper repentance. But the *usual* stance of the maturing walk with Jesus is *faith* and *patience*.

James 5:7-8 - "*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord*. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. [8] *You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*."

There's a crop growing for those who continue in faith. Establish your heart with this eternal truth.